

Pharr native wins literary award

Garcia receives Américo Paredes Literary Arts Prize for fiction

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Thomas Ray Garcia, a Pharr native, is the winner of the 2022 Américo Paredes Literary Arts Prize for fiction. He is a writer, educator, scholar, and entrepreneur.

The contest was judged by author Tim Z. Hernandez, who selected Garcia's short story volume "The River Runs: Stories," published by FlowerSong Press in McAllen.

"The River Runs: Stories" resists a singular vision of the border, centering the Rio Grande as a site of

transformation. Every river crossing subverts stereotypes projected by politicians and media pundits while presenting to readers a world unlike their own. Here, river crossings lead to cross country runs and astral projections. A pregnant teenager learns about motherhood from a curandera. A scholarship boy grapples with his fronterizo identity. The sister of a border patrol agent lives in fear of deportation. A child looks into the eye of a drone and sees his family anew. These stories present revitalized insights into border culture, highlighting tales of resilience while refusing to shy away from the omnipresent reality the river imposes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Garcia self-published a children's picture book, "Speechless," to



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empower young Latinos to practice public speaking. He is also the co-author of an upcoming historical memoir tentatively titled "El Curso de la Raza: The Education of Aurelio Manuel Montemayor" from Texas A&M University Press.

He is the founder and executive director of the College Scholarship Leadership Access Program (CSLAP), which teaches college ac-

cess lessons and connects near-peer mentors to high school students in the Rio Grande Valley. In 2022, he ran for the Texas State Board of Education and earned endorsements from Run for Something, Texas AFL-CIO, and Texas AFT. He is currently an English PhD candidate at UCLA.

At Princeton University, Garcia received the Ward Mathis Short Story Prize for his U.S.-Mexico borderlands fiction. He has published short stories and poetry in *The New Engagement*, *riverSedge*, *BorderSenses*, and *The Acentos Review*.

Each year, the American Folklore Society Committee on Cultural Diversity, Chicana/Chicano Section, and Folklore Latino, Latinoamericano, y Caribeño



Courtesy photo

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Section join with the AFS Executive Board to give this prize of \$200, which recognizes excellence in integrating scholarship and engagement with the people and communities one studies, or in teaching and encouraging scholars and practitioners to work in their own cultures or communities.

The award was named for Américo Paredes (1915–1999), a leading scholar

in folklore and Greater Mexico studies, worked relentlessly throughout his life, in the words of Olga Najera-Ramirez, “to better understand, represent, and respect the rights, lives, and culture of U.S. Latinas and Latinos.”

Paredes contributed significantly to the formation of various intellectual trends and in particular to the scholarship on “native” folklorists and anthropologists; indeed, he trained several generations of “natives.” Don Américo taught at the University of Texas from 1957 until his retirement in 1984.